

---

Citation:

Webster, CS (2018) Turning the Tables: Media Constructions of British Asians from Victims to Criminals, 1962 to 2011. In: Media, Crime, Racism. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 11-32. ISBN 978-3-319-71776-0, 978-3-319-71775-3 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71776-0>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/4008/>

Document Version:

Book Section (Accepted Version)

---

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on [openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

**Turning the Tables? Media Constructions of British Asians from Victims to Criminals, 1962 to 2011, in Bhatia, M., Poynting, S. and Tufail, W. (eds.) (2017) Media, Crime, Racism, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.**

Colin Webster

**Introduction: British Asians, the media and the race-ethnicity 'problem'**

Our story really begins with the criminalization of Asian immigration to Britain in 1971. At the time, a prescient book about the treatment of race in the British press by Hugo Young (1971: 29-41, his emphasis) argued that,

*... race only earns its place in the news to the extent that it is bad news... This is because everything to do with coloured people takes place against an underlying premise that they are the symbols or the embodiments of a problem.*

The context however, is the Conservative Government's Commonwealth and Immigration Act 1962 beginning the process whereby politicians began to set the terms of debate about race issues. In these terms, most notably, Enoch Powell's widely reported apocalyptic 'Rivers of Blood' speech on 20 April 1968, set the trend. Criticising Commonwealth immigration and anti-discrimination legislation that had been proposed in the United Kingdom, the speech resulted in Powell's dismissal from the Conservative Shadow Cabinet amidst popular public support.

This chapter describes the processes and mechanisms of media induced campaigns that construct the issues of 'race' and immigration represented in some sense as public or social 'problems' and 'threats' to order. Focusing on a succession of periods marked by distinctive themes around race and immigration we can see a dominant media discourse build up about these 'problems' and 'threats'. Although directed at racialized visible minority groups generally, the chapter shows the particular role that British Asians come to play in a transformative drama in which they are at first seen as benign and even victims of injustice, then as coming to represent the greatest threat of all, towards the end of our period. These periods are important as they show the transformation in public perceptions through supposed transgressions by the group of thresholds of public tolerance in which race and ethnicity are increasingly linked to violence and crime.

The theoretical discussion on how to interpret and understand these series of cumulative periods of media representation and imagery is found towards the end of the chapter in the discussion 'from victims to criminals'. This section summarises the transformation already alluded to in this introduction in how British Asians are seen. The final concluding theoretical discussion firmly locates media treatments of the 'problem' of race and ethnicity within an ideology of populism (Muller 2016). That is the media's paradoxical denial of diversity while celebrating the plurality of 'liberal' individual freedoms within one nation.

**Closing the circle? A law and order campaign against British Asians**

The media through 'accredited or authoritative sources', such as the police, judiciary, experts and politicians, rely on these sources to help define then reproduce the parameters

of the race-ethnicity 'problem', and may connect this problem to other problems such as crime and disorder, through association, repeatedly described and replicated. Once the media have spoken on behalf of the inaudible public, newsworthy deviant and dramatic events become defined and reproduced, authoritative sources and press become mutually supporting and reinforcing, closing off the event to alternative explanations. This 'closure of the circle' becomes the framework of interpretation for all future events and discussion of the problem. In other words, these terms and reference points are those in which all future debate about the topic is conducted and allowed (see Hartman 1970, Carrabine 2008, Ferguson 1998, Van Dijk 1991).

The historical types of media-induced moral panics about the presence of the race-ethnicity problem run in cycles and can escalate. This escalation of media supported anxiety about the presence of immigrants and visible minorities in Britain has seen long term processes coming to fruition, in the strong place nativist and anti-immigrant feeling has in England and Wales referendum decision to leave the European Union. It is not difficult however to see the mechanisms and sequence of this campaign from the 1960s onwards. We can begin to understand how the media through publicly signifying race and ethnicity as 'problems' and associating this with issues of crime and the creation of disorder, the perceived potential threat of an issue escalates. In identifying and problematising the presence of British Asians in certain places as a 'minority', linking by labelling that presence to other problems whereby boundaries are created and 'thresholds' of acceptable values and behaviours are crossed, convergence occurs. That is, as the period we are discussing progresses so that 'there is a tendency to 'map' together increasing numbers of problems as constituting *one single threat*, and for this convergence to contain an increasing purely ideological construction.' (CCCS Mugging Group 1975: 63).

Eventually, as thresholds and boundaries staking out societal tolerance limits are progressively broken and thresholds breached – of permissible and acceptable cultural and moral standards and values to legal thresholds to the crossing of extreme violence thresholds – the specific issue and group become perceived as a threat. As the period progresses there is an increasing tendency for events to be perceived as having pushed beyond thresholds stressing illegality and the flouting of social authority.

The following overlapping periodization attempts to briefly summarise the main terms and reference points in which the media problematized the presence of British Asians in the United Kingdom from the early 1960s to 2011.

### **1962-1976 Illegal immigration, deportation and political protest**

The early to mid-1970s were marked by government panic about Asian immigration, following the introduction of the Immigration Act 1971 which granted the right of the dependants of Commonwealth citizens settled in Britain to live in Britain. However, because the rights of entry for dependants was not an automatic one and entry was policed and enforced by Immigration Officers and the police, who also deal with public demonstrations against Home Office decisions on behalf of individual's appeals, the issue became criminalized (see Guia et al 2012; Weber 2013).

Ever since 1961 (anticipating the Conservative government's immigration law in 1962), politicians had set the terms of debate about race issues, politicizing race relations, and there had been political events around race that hit the headlines (Patterson 1967). These were usually framed by the media as 'the riot story' referring to any sort of affray, or the 'illegal immigrants' story in the context of the Immigration Appeals system set up under the 1969 Immigration Appeals Act. Illegal immigration was a running sore in press coverage of race from the 1962 Immigration Act onwards, increasingly around migration from India and Pakistan and the issuing of vouchers for specific jobs in Britain. The 1965 White Paper further reduced legal immigration for unskilled workers. The 1968 Immigration Act for the first time, made the failure to submit to examination by an immigration officer a criminal offence. It wasn't though until the 1971 Act made possible the removal or criminal prosecution of illegal immigrants, and retrospectively too, for removal of past illegal immigrants. Fear of the Home Office and police was constant. In 1961 no Commonwealth citizen could be deported. Between 1962 and 1969 relatively recently arrived convicted persons could be deported, but after the 1971 Act deportation could happen on grounds of 'general undesirability'; and a person being an 'illegal entrant' (Bottomley 1970). Thus, began the criminalization of immigration reported in the usual ways the media reports any crime.

The media coverage and construction of immigration became frequent and sometimes complicated. From the unambiguously hostile, as the *Daily Mail's* comment section makes clear 'Illegal immigration is a serious crime – because it threatens the whole climate of race relations in this country' (4 May 1973), to more discreet but constant treatment depending on the method and style of individual newspapers. Some papers looked sympathetically to the plight of illegal immigrants' subject to blackmail and exploitation, but as usual, any context was largely missing.

By January 1976 headlines such as 'The Illegal Immigrants of London' (*London Evening News*), 'Ghost Migrant Scandal' (*Sun*), 'Immigrant Survey Shocks Caterers' (*Guardian*), 'The Illegal Workers in London Cafes – 84% No Right To Be Here' (*Evening Standard*), 'Illegals in Spotlight' (*Catering Times*), displaced the real issue, summarised at the time by the independent Black magazine *Race Today* (February 1976: 32) that 'British workers have refused the low pay and long hours attached to jobs in catering. No worker in Britain, including migrant blacks, unless he/ she is defeated and demoralised, would work for £30 for a 100 hour week.'

### **1970-1972 The Kenyan and Ugandan Asian Immigration Crisis**

It wasn't only supposed illegal immigration that raised the press's ire. East African Asians were British citizens because they were given this choice when the African countries they had settled became independent. They were a complicated and 'inconvenient' legacy of the old British Empire. Many chose British citizenship rather than Ugandan or Kenyan citizenship because their future seemed uncertain in the countries they were living. They were then in effect expelled by the new African leaders of those countries in the ensuing nationalism brought by independence.

In response to Britain's responsibilities towards Ugandan Asians, *The Times* leader of 14 August 1972 plaintive cry was,

Immigrants already settled here stand to suffer more than anyone else from a rate of new immigration greater than the social body of the host country can digest, or that its prejudices can tolerate.

Although most of the British press had been forthright in advocating the acceptance by the government of its responsibilities toward the Kenyan and Ugandan Asians in their leader columns, actual news copy was less sanguine.

### **1970-1972 'Paki-bashing' and the beginnings of Asian self-defence**

At the time of the East African Immigration Crisis, another, less publicised phenomenon began in the East End of London as the early 1970s witnessed the formation of 'vigilante squads' organised by Pakistanis after several incidents of what became known as 'Paki-bashing'. This was also the case for the later arrived Bengalis (London 1973). Asians beaten up in East London received little protection from the police, and when they began to organize their own defence they were arrested. Until early 1970 there had been few reports in the national press of the numerous incidents in which Asian immigrants had been the victims of unprovoked assaults. In most cases the attackers were white youths – and the police never seemed able to trace them.

There was a reference to the problem as early as 21 October 1968 in the *Guardian* when complaints that the police were not doing enough to protect the Asian community from attack were made. But it was not until April 1970 that reports of such incidents hit the headlines so dramatically that the problem could no longer be ignored by the authorities (Ashe et al 2016).

The first press reference to Paki-bashing came on Friday 3 April 1970, when several national daily newspapers carried stories of skinhead attacks on two Asian employees of the London Chest Hospital in Bethnal Green. Five days after the first reports three young skinheads were televised boasting about beating up Pakistanis. The programme scandalised many people. The very next day, a 50-year-old kitchen porter Tosir Ali was murdered outside his home in Tower Hamlets. The murder was sensational and topical enough to be widely reported (London 1973).

The parallels with the hugely publicised racist murder of a young black man Stephen Lawrence in 23 years later are clear. In the 1990s though, a media campaign by the *Daily Mail* helped identify his killers, and forced the police and the government to reform the policing of racist violence. In 1970 the police did nothing.

Again, thinking of media pressure and police inaction, the murder of Tosir Ali took place in a week when reports of 'Paki-bashing' were making headlines in both national and local newspapers, as a murder clearly inspired by racial hatred. An editorial in the London *Evening Standard* of 8 April linked the murder with other attacks on Pakistanis and fascism. On the same day, however, the police discounted any suggestion that this had been a 'skinhead attack', stating that there was no evidence that coloured people were being

attacked more often than whites (*Observer*, 5 April 1970) despite almost daily press reports that this was the case. This and other incidents at the time discouraged trust in the legal system, or that the police would protect the Asian community from attack (London 1973).

Tosir Ali's murder was the catalyst to the forming of albeit poorly organised vigilante and defence groups to defend Pakistani communities against attacks from whites. This time papers like the *Evening News* and the *Sun* (8 April 1970) widely reported the reaction of the police and other authorities condemning vigilantism. Furthermore, the police arrested and convicted Asians for carrying offensive weapons which they claimed they had with them for self-protection, again widely reported in the press. Racist murders, violent attacks and increasing police mistreatment of *Asians* (not only Blacks) continued apace throughout the 1970s. Police brutality against Asians was perceived to becoming more prevalent in East London at the time. Again, *this* was often not reported by the mainstream press (London 1973).

### **1974-1977 Policing Asian industrial relations**

It is difficult today to understand how prominent discussion and reporting of industrial relations by the media was in the 1970s. Both the printed press and the BBC employed armies of industrial relations reporters and correspondents, something which has completely disappeared today (Mills 2016). The 1970s were a time of considerable industrial militancy across the country and different industrial sectors among Asian workers. Often, Asian strikers faced open racism and hostility from white fellow workers when embarking on disputes about pay, conditions and the rights of Asian workers to be trade union representatives at the workplace (Taylor 1974).

Asian women throughout the period of primary migration in the 1960s and 1970s provided a significant reserve of cheap labour. Many of them were employed in low paid factories and the service industries under extremely poor conditions of long hours and little rest. As an example, cleaners at Heathrow airport were all Asian women, mostly middle-aged and older (Race Today 1974).

The industrial conflict in the Bradford Textile Industry is a case in point, revealing of mostly local media treatment of race and industrial disputes. The West Yorkshire textile industry was notorious for segregating shifts and facilities between its Asian and white workers, pay and conditions, and paying Asian workers less for the same work doing longer, more unsocial hours. Just as some high profile industrial disputes attracted a lot of press coverage, especially when this involved the policing of picket lines, many disputes went unreported and unexplained.

The local press in Bradford during the 1960s vigorously debated whether Asian wool textile workers in Bradford constituted 'cheap labour'. The context was to replace white men with white women, then replace white women with Asian men to cheapen wages and increase the intensity of exploitation and insecurity of labour at a time of a general and drastic *reduction* of employment in wool textiles between 1965 and 1980. This response to a cumulative crisis of the wool textile industry in Britain was employers concentrating their

efforts on reducing labour costs through the reduction of employment, maintaining or increasing output without increasing the wages of the workers who remained.

In fact, Asian workers were distributed differently between and within firms according to levels of technological backwardness, size and product so that Asians were overrepresented on night work. Over time Asians were recruited to do the dirtier work and work longer hours with the spread of new machines. A racial division of labour was introduced into wool textiles in the 1950s when Asians were recruited into jobs rejected by other workers and this hardly changed later (Fevre 1984). Racism at work was found most in British managers' and employers' stereotypes of Asians and Black workers. Eventually, in the 1970s and early 1980s Asians left the wool textile industry under very different circumstances to the white workers who had preceded them. White workers had left for better jobs, Asians left for unemployment, as they had not benefited from the earlier expansion of alternatives to textile work, nor did they benefit from more limited expansion of service industries in later years (of which white women were the main beneficiaries). Additionally, according to Fevre (1984) Asian men variously vied with white women in their attractiveness to textile employers.

The period 1974 to 1977 was particularly marked by widely publicised industrial disputes involving Asian workers. The strike at Imperial Typewriters, the inferior treatment of Asian workers at Ford's, Dagenham and numerous incidents of industrial unrest involving Asian workers throughout the 1970s not only fought employers discrimination and unfair treatment in the workplace but for recognition by their trade unions to make strikes official and recognise their election as trade union representatives and shop stewards, often amidst white colleague's hostility and a generally divide and rule approach by employers and unions. At Imperial Typewriters, several strikers were arrested and faced criminal charges through picketing (Ramdin 1987).

In May 1977, the strike of the Asian workers at Grunwick film Processing Laboratories and Mail Order in North London received wide press coverage in their dispute with the white management and only passive support from the TUC (Taylor and Dromey, 2016). The industrial struggle of migrant wage earners can be characterised by the Trade Unions themselves sanctioning race discrimination at the workplace by protecting white privileges in pay and conditions rather than promoting the interests of their black and Asian members. In 1973 and 1974 when two thirds of the work force at Ford's, Dagenham was immigrant, strikes against redundancies were invariably wild-cat and unofficial.

Asian workers on strike at the London Rubber Company demanding union recognition to support underlying issues of low pay, unsocial shift hours and health hazards on the job, was again met by police heavy handedness on the picket line, escorting strike breakers into the factory. Here as elsewhere, Asian workers were represented as troublesome and militant. Asian workers were disproportionately involved in industrial disputes and strikes very publicly policed at picket lines and publicised in the press (Ramdin 1987). Through the 1960s and 1970s, in small textile factories, plastics, electrical components and the larger heavy industry sector, Asian workers strike for union recognition, against racial discrimination receiving lower pay and poorer conditions than white workers, denied apprenticeships and

safe working conditions. The history of Asian shop-floor industrial action was an indictment of racism in trade unions in Britain (Ramdin 1987).

### **1976-1987 The rebellion of the Asian Youth Movements**

A strong movement of Asian youth had emerged around the question of deportation and immigration controls in the 1970s. In the 1981 Brixton uprisings, it is often forgotten that Asian youth as well as African Caribbeans and whites were involved in specific public order situations. In particular, the defence by 6,000 Asian young people of the community in Southall against invasion by Far-Right racists, and in Bradford in July where twelve young Asian men were arrested and charged with conspiracy to manufacture explosives and conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm. The defendants were later acquitted after claiming that they armed themselves in self-defence. On 23 April 1979 in Southall, London, 6,000 Asians demonstrated and attempted to prevent 59 members of the racist National Front being escorted by the police to hold an election 'meeting' in the area. Clashes with police resulted in the death of a white demonstrator – Blair Peach – clubbed by a police unit (Dummett 1980).

A political demonstration to stop the National Front marching through Bradford's Asian and Caribbean Manningham area in 1976, quickly turned to violent clashes between local young people and the police, receiving no press coverage at all. Clashes in Leeds between young blacks and police the previous year in Chapeltown, Leeds led to a number of arrests. This more or less low level disorder was becoming more and more common, often beneath the radar of both local and national press.

As Ramamurthy's (2006) political history of Asians in Britain shows, the Asian Youth Movements (AYM) of the 1970 and 1980s based in an ethnic politics of secularism, tackled racial violence, police injustice and immigration controls, thus joining media treatments of wider political protest. By this time, the first generation born in Britain, beginning with the Southall Youth Movement, aimed to tackle popular racism and police racism through self-defence. Amidst considerable media publicity the movement spread to Bradford and elsewhere where the AYM demonstrated publicly, much to the consternation of the police, against incursions into their areas of far-right racist organizations, racist murders and deportation of illegal immigrants and the rights of families to be united.

### **1988-1989 The Rushdie Affair: Islamization of public protest**

Focusing on the representation of race and violent crime in the press, Sveinsson (2008) shows how earlier, cruder, negative *biological* attitudes to 'race' became less strident, and in some ways less acceptable as time wore on, only to be supplemented and in part replaced by a sort of '*cultural*' racism – coding 'racial' differences and conflicts as 'cultural' differences and conflicts. The shift from crude biological racism to cultural racism identified by Sveinsson (2008) as the dominant press discourse on race, crime and disorder could probably be located, and triggered by, 'the Salman Rushdie affair', particularly the public 'book-burning' in Bolton and Bradford by groups of British Muslims of Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 and 1989. Rushdie was subsequently condemned to death by Iraq's leader Ayatollah Khomeini encouraging any Muslim to carry out this 'Fatwa'. The typical



media response was a series of generalized assumptions that *all* British Muslims supported Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa. Thus, began a new and particularly strong version of the notion of 'unassimilable cultural difference', only later metamorphosing into the idea of 'self-segregation' (Cantle 2002).

### **1989-1994 Resurgence of racist violent and Asian self-defence: constructing Asian criminality**

This author and others (Webster 1996, 1997) have discussed this period at length elsewhere. It is a period of increasing violent racist attacks on Asians, the increasing defence by Asian young people of the areas in which they lived, and increasing violent retaliation against white racists constructing and invading what whites perceived to be areas belonging to Asians. It is in this period particularly when Asian young people are transformed by the media from relatively 'quiet' and 'law-abiding' to potentially violent criminals and involved in crime and drugs.

What distinguishes this period from the 1976-87 period of Asian young people's consciously political leadership against racism under the AYM leadership is its relative lack of overt political ideology and its relatively unorganised, ad hoc defence against violent white racism and everyday racism in smaller towns. It is perhaps the least reported of the periods under consideration here. Or, more accurately, most misperceived by media reporting, as the following themed sections show.

### **1993-2001 Media constructions of British Asian and Muslim criminality**

In Malik's (2002) account, television documentary form too has increasingly lent itself to portraying British Asians (and particularly Muslims, as part of an emerging underclass because of crime, drug abuse and family breakdown. Even critically acclaimed documentaries made by black and Asian producers, such as an edition of *Panorama* entitled *Underclass in Purdah* (BBC 1, 1993), can fall into the trap of Asians-as-social-problem narratives. Social problems are here collapsed into cultural and religious ones ('Purdah' a veil screening or secluding these 'problems') so that images of illegality (drugs, prostitution, family violence, battered women) filmed in parts of the Manningham area of Bradford were presumed to be representative of the entire British Asian community (Malik 2002).

The primary definers, as is often the case, are white police men and professionals. The documentary concluded (cited in Malik 2002: 53),

In many ways, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis find themselves in a worse position today than when they first arrived in Britain 30 years ago.... Muslim Asians are now asking themselves how they got into this position when other ethnic groups are doing so much better.'

The programme was a key marker of, and consistent with the shifts discussed earlier of an escalation throughout the 1990s of identifying and problematising the presence of British Muslims as a threat. As Malik (2002) agrees, a key image of British Asians in the 1990s focused on the threat and manifestations of what was depicted as religious fundamentalism in relation to British Muslims '...who became *the* ethnic folk devils during the 1990s.' (p 54).

## **1995-2001 Constructing British Muslim public disorder**

The trope of the hidden, fearful, threat of sudden and extreme violence has become an organising press principle, framework and repertoire, from which the mass media draw. It has become extremely damaging to the fortunes and prospects of the mass of law abiding, respectable British Muslims. This author (Webster 2011, also see Kundnani 2007) was one of those who argued that the depiction of British Muslims as a community suffering a crisis of parental control over its 'uncontrollable' young people was offered by primary definers as a cause of the first widespread public disorders involving Asian young people in Bradford, West Yorkshire in 1995. At the time, Keith Hellawell, then Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police, stated that 'Cultural and religious leaders have been worried for the past ten years or so that the younger generation don't follow their teachings and feel that they have great difficulty in controlling them' (quoted in the *Independent* 12.6.95).

The public disorders, again mostly involving Muslim and some black and white young men, in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley – all former textile towns in Northern England – in the spring and summer of 2001, led to widely reported official calls – both mirroring and feeding mainstream media – to end supposed 'self-segregation' and build 'community cohesion'.

## **2005-2011 The Terrorist Threat and Islamophobia**

Earlier worries about disorder and disaffection were elided with, eclipsed and displaced by fear of terrorist attack as the UK joined the US's 'asymmetrical' 'war on terror' after 9/11. The bomb attacks in London (2005) and Glasgow (2007), the two failed shoe bombers (2001 and 2010) and the 2003 bombing in Tel Aviv, carried out by British-born 'Islamic political terrorists' (Abbas 2007) were harbingers of Hall and Jefferson's (1993) earlier analysis of the relationship between 'the societal control culture and the news media' in the construction of a law and order campaign. In particular, that earlier moral panics about British Asian, particularly Muslim, associations with crime and disorder, had converged and linked issues and 'problems' focused on this group, into *one single threat*.

## **Overview: From victims to criminals**

Over the whole period, what began as non-violent political protest and public demonstrations by British Asians over deportations and the criminalization of illegal immigration in the 1960s until the mid-1970s, was followed by the policing of non-violent industrial conflict and strikes in which Asian workers took a prominent part in the 1970s. During these periods the press and mass media mixed responses and constructions of the 'problem' of Asian immigrant political and workplace protest were ambiguous. Complicated by press sympathy towards a group perceived as *victims* of family disruption through 'inhumane' immigration law preventing family reunion, unfairly exploited at work, and as victims of racist violence defending themselves from attack, Asians were represented at the threshold of legitimacy crossing over to, or pushing, thresholds of legality. As the period progresses there is a tendency for primary definers and the press to differentiate the original immigrant parent culture as law abiding from its increasingly rebellious youth movement. With the Islamization of public protest seen in the public burning of books and conflict over the content and ethos of schooling, including its segregation, and the

construction of Asian criminality, cultural racism emerges. Eventually, as the 1990s progress, the tendency to 'map' together criminality, public disorder and violence, in which Asians are perceived by whites and the press as crossing the 'extreme violence' threshold – through violent defence and retaliation against white racists attacking their areas – finally, gets confirmed in direct public disorders against far-right threats and the police, seen first in the 1995 and especially 2001 public disorders, threatening to undermine the State itself. From these disorders and UK related 'Islamic political terrorist' bombings from 2001 to 2010 (Abbas 2007, Webster 2011), and taking its cue from the response to the earlier disorders, the government launched its action plan 'Preventing violent extremism: winning hearts and minds' in April 2007, to support the arguably incoherent notion of 'community cohesion', and strengthen the role of faith institutions and Islamic leaders in resisting a particular sort of violent extremism (Webster 2014).

Our story in a sense both ends around 2011 and begins the next twist in the tale of the media treatment of Asians, race and crime. From now onwards there is really only *one* story – a 'master narrative' about the 'terrorist threat' (Kundnani 2015). The turning point is most marked by prime minister David Cameron's public criticism of previous government's policies of 'multiculturalism' as a way of governing ethnic and religious relations in Britain, as encouraging segregation and as a threat to community cohesion and shared national identity. Stating that 'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream', Cameron (2011) was asserting, like previous British governments had done, the integration of cultures and values around 'one nation' (see Parekh, 2000, Cattle, 2001). Framed in this way, widely and sympathetically reported, these coded, repeated charges had the connotation of a pervasive obsession with the vulnerability of young Muslims as a group to 'Islamist extremism', as evidenced in Cameron's speech. According to this perspective the worry is of isolation, of segregation, of a lack of contact, interaction and understanding between different faith and ethnic groups (see Webster 2014). Of course, Cameron's framing and its more or less faithful reproduction by the media was designed to close rather than open debate about the empirical facts of the existence of different 'cultures'; and the balance to be struck between equal treatment, different treatment and maintaining social cohesion.

### **Theory and populism: Asians, racism and the media**

Set up in 1968, the Runnymede Trust prioritised the daily monitoring of press coverage of race issues in Britain, explicitly recognising that white attitudes and opinions towards black and Asian people would be influenced and shaped by what was presented in the mass media. This daily press monitoring continued until quite recently. Harman and Husband, in their 1974 book 'Racism and the Mass Media' analysed press coverage from 1963 to 1970. They found that race relations coverage tended to focus on signs of racial conflict and to give very little attention to the access of black people to housing, education and employment. Gordon and Rosenberg (1989) were able to summarise the period over twenty years until the publication of their book, as newspapers treating black and Asian people as a social problem and as a threat to white British society. The stories were of immigration, the

speeches and statements of the MP and Minister Enoch Powell from April 1968 warning of serious racial conflict and strife if immigration was not stopped and black and Asian people being encouraged to leave Britain. This extensive and prolonged coverage helped create a climate of racist opinion.

The thread running through all media coverage of race issues over the twenty-year period Gordon and Rosenberg covered was illegal immigration – whether of (inaccurate) attacks on the Asian system of arranged marriages supposedly used to obtain British citizenship, press campaigns for tighter immigration restrictions, or ‘visa cheats’ – in effect criminalising entry to Britain. Headlines and stories constantly referred to black and Asian people as ‘scrounging’ welfare benefits, as a problem of ‘law and order’, as synonymous with public disorder, while equally consistently ignoring the situation of Asian people as victims of racial violence, and suffering racial inequality in housing, education and employment.

Gordon and Rosenberg (1989) showed how race issues are an urgent and recurrent ‘populist’ concern. Muller’s (2016: 2) highly nuanced discussion of populism allows us to provide a rough definition of populism as a political orientation of politicians and their supporters in the press, on both the Left and the Right, that wants to appeal to ‘the people’ against the views of the ‘establishment’ and elites, to tell a story that can be understood by as many citizens as possible, to appear to be sensitive to how ‘ordinary people’ think and, in particular, feel, while manipulating their political support.

In a version of populist media coverage, the ‘New Right’ constructs a seemingly new ‘common sense’ about race that promotes racism through a common set of themes. As we saw in the 1970s and 1980s, very much like today, populism supported and justified policies restricting the entry of black and Asian people into Britain; it questioned the notion of a multi-racial or multicultural society; it challenged ‘establishment’ definitions of racism and anti-racism; and finally, offered its own portrayals of different minority groups. Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s ‘immigration’ was *always* Asian and black immigration not white immigration from the ‘White Commonwealth’ and Europe. Cultural pluralism, when it is recognised at all, is opposed as a threat to British values and national culture, in which assimilation and integration can only be in terms of the majority British culture as people of different cultures do not get on with one another.

Press commentators and politicians’ express opposition to anti-discrimination measures and anti-racism, so that ‘Nobody is less able to face the truth than the hysterical anti-racist brigade... so-called anti-racists... are only interested in suppressing the truth and the right to free speech’ (*The Sun* 26 February 1986, cited in Gordon and Rosenberg, p 28). The Honeyford affair’ in Bradford, West Yorkshire, for example generated many articles from columnists, defending the head teacher Ray Honeyford who resigned following his published attack on multicultural education. By rejecting anti-racism and multiculturalism as ideas the press undermined the efficacy of opposing racism and the understanding that all societies contain a plurality of cultures and disagreements about values: in effect a refusal to acknowledge, and to deny, the existence of racism and discrimination.

As well as generally reviewing press coverage of race and violent crime, Sveinsson (2008) systematically examined crime articles in the national print media as well as a selection of regional media over a period of two months – 1 May to 30 June 2007 – demonstrating how notions of race tint the lens through which criminality is both viewed and projected. His conclusion was that,

Culturalist explanations for behaviour have entered crime reporting of the mainstream media in force... The claim that 'culture' is the source of violent crime necessarily attaches violence to certain 'communities' defined by their ethnic 'identity'. This implies that most members of those groups are violent. The effect is that entire 'communities' are criminalized on the basis of their 'cultures'. (p 3)

Van Dijk (1991) emphasises the role that ideology plays in reproducing the dominance of one ethnic group over another. By 'ideology', here what is meant is simply ideas and meanings that legitimate or promote the power of a dominant social group or class. The press reproduces its own view of hierarchy and the power structure through ideas and meanings. But it also possesses its own autonomous ideology which allows it to deny accusations of racism and impartiality or bias about race. This is because as Chibnall (1977) argued, press ideology internal to news journalism and its organization hinges on a view of 'professionalism', which organizes and integrates a series of largely unconscious perceptions and thoughts. The professionalism of journalism corresponds to 'news value' or the relevance of some news stories and not others. Chibnall (1977: 19) reminds us, despite its emphasis on law and order, press ideology is 'profoundly *liberal*'. It is a paradox of press populism (which denies a plurality of *societal* cultural values) that it recognizes that we live in a plural society of competing *individual* points of view in which no side can claim a monopoly of truth.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

At each stage and period of the media treatment of Asian minorities, particular press obsessions shift while the master discursive baton of ethno-racist framing of Asian-Muslim criminality, disorder and deviance is passed on. Today, perhaps of greatest significance is the process by which online and social media not only reports and frames 'the problem' of Islam and violent extremism, but is *itself* said to be part of the problem, as the major source generating violent extremism.

The brutal killing in May 2013 of an off-duty soldier named Lee Rigby near his barracks in Woolwich, southeast London by two young British men of Nigerian descent, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, was linked to the fact that six months earlier Adebowale had talked on Facebook about his desire to slaughter a soldier. Politicians turned on social networks for not doing enough to stop extremists, accusing Facebook and the like of providing a safe haven for terrorists and of not living up to their social responsibility (Dodd, et al 2014). Internet companies have since faced intense demands to monitor messages on behalf of the state for signs of terrorist intent.

Multimedia and social media platforms, online and offline sources of constructing Muslims as victims *and* perpetrators of violence and abuse, are new developments and offer new

opportunities. For example, Zempi and Awan (2016) interviewed Muslim men and women who had been victims of both online and offline Islamophobia in the UK. Fears about, and hostility towards, Muslims and Muslim communities, involving abuse and targeted violence against them are the underlying expressions of Islamophobia, and as such are a form of cultural racism. Islamophobia on the internet interacts with media demonization of Muslims, particularly triggered by local, national and international incidents and events. And of course, overriding everything else is the role that the internet is said to play in the radicalization of young Muslims. Even though, as Kundnani (2014) argues, radicalization is best understood through its social, and particularly political circumstances, not, as most commentators insist, through social media induced psychology or theology.

The media treatment of British Asians, crime and disorder, is shaped by a conception of society as an unchanging 'consensus'. Newsworthy events are those which seem to interrupt this consensual calm, challenging some of the major boundaries of that consensus – defined by the law, embodying the 'popular' will of the people – marking 'our way of life' and its connected values. News symbolically reasserts the values of society, public morality and its limit of tolerance, by 'mapping problematic reality.' The eliding of race, ethnicity and violence derives its special status as news value as constituting a critical threshold in society, the violation of which places the racialized perpetrator (and sometimes victim) outside society altogether.

## References

- Abbas, T. (ed.) (2007) *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ashe, S., Virdee, S., and Brown, L. (2016) Striking back against racist violence in the East End of London, 1968-1970, *Race and Class*, 58(1), pp. 34-54.
- Bottomley, A. (1970) *Control of Commonwealth immigration: An analysis and summary of the evidence taken by the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration 1969-70*, London: Runnymede Trust.
- Cameron, D. (2011) 'PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference', 5 February 2011, available at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/>
- Cantle, T. (2002) *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, London: Home Office.
- Carrabine, E. (2008) *Crime, Culture and the Media*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- CCCS Mugging Group (1975[2006]) 'Some notes on the relationship between the societal control culture and the news media, and the construction of a law and order campaign', Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds.) *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*, Second Edition, London: Routledge.

- Dodd, V., MacAskill, E. and Wintour, P. 'Lee Rigby murder: Facebook could have picked up killer's message – report', *The Guardian*, 25 November 2014.
- Ferguson, R. (1998) *Representing 'Race': Ideology, identity and the media*, London: Arnold.
- Fevre, R. (1984) *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination*, Aldershot: Gower.
- Gordon, P. and Rosenberg, D. (1989) *The press and black people in Britain*, London: The Runnymede Trust
- Guia, M.J., Woude, M. and Leun, J. (2012) *Social Control and Justice: Crimmigration in the Age of Fear*, The Hague: Eleven International Publishing
- Hall, S. (1980) 'Encoding/Decoding', in Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A. and Willis, P., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, London: Hutchinson, pp. 128-138.
- Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J. and Roberts, B. (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London: Macmillan.
- Hartman, P. (1970) 'The Mass Media and Racial Prejudice', *Race Today*, Vol 2, No8, August 1970, pp 266-268.
- Kundani, A. (2007) *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain*, London: Pluto.
- Kundnani, A. (2014) *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism and The Domestic War on Terror*, London: Verso.
- London, L. 'The East End of London: Paki-Bashing in 1970', *Race Today*, December 1973, Vol 5, No 11, p. 337-341.
- M. Dummett (1980) *Southall 23 April 1979: The Report of the Unofficial Committee of Enquiry: 23rd April, 1979*, London: National Council for Civil Liberties.
- Malik, S. (2002) *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television*, London: Sage.
- Mills, T. (2016) *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, London: Verso.
- Muller, Jan-Werner (2016) *What is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Parekh Report (2000) *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, London: Runnymede Trust.
- Patterson, S. (1967) *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain 1960-1967*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Race Today Collective 'Low Pay, Long Hours, and a Small Flames of Rebellion', *Race Today*, Vol 6, No 5, May 1974, pp 137-139.
- Ramamurthy, A. (2006) 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', *Race & Class*, Vol. 48(2): 38–60.

- Ramdin, R. ([1987] 2017) *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, London: Avebury.
- Sveinsson, K. P. (2008) *A Tale of Two Englands: 'Race' and Violent Crime in the Press*, London: Runnymede Trust, available <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/TwoEnglands-2008.pdf>
- Taylor, G. and Dromey, J. (2016) *Grunwick: The Workers' Story*, 2nd Edition, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Taylor, R. (1974) 'Asians and a Union', *New Society*, Vol 28, No 608, 30 May.
- Taylor, R. 'Asians and a Union', *New Society*, Vol 28, No 608, 30 May 1974.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1991) *Racism and The Press*, London: Routledge.
- Weber, L. (2013) *Policing Non-Citizens*, London: Routledge.
- Webster, C. (2011) 'The Construction of Criminality and Disorder among British Muslim Young People', in Farrar, M., Robinson, S., Valli, Y. and Wetherly, P. (eds.) (2011) *'Islam' in 'the West': Key Issues in Multiculturalism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Webster, C. (2014) 'Negotiating identities: ethnicity, religion and social cohesion in London and Bradford', in Phillips, C. and Webster, C. (eds.) *New Directions in Race, Ethnicity and Crime*, London: Routledge.
- Young, H. (1971) 'The Treatment of Race in the British Press', in Jones, C. (ed.) (1971) *Race and the Press: Four Essays*, London: The Runnymede Trust, pp 29-41.
- Zempi, I. and Awan, I. (2016) *Islamophobia: Lived experiences of online and offline victimisation*, Bristol: Policy Press.

**7,126 words**